Greetings from Arathusa!

This has been two weeks of the most vivid manifestation of life and death. We were privileged enough to witness both the birth of a new baby wildebeest as well as the death of one of our much-loved Kuhuma male lions.

As stated in our previous report, we have been seeing a lot more of the five big Mapogo male lions. Last week the elusive sixth member of the group finally joined the pride. Bigger, darker and bolder than the rest, he lent a menacing presence. Absolutely mind-blowing sightings of all of them together followed. Unfortunately this spectacle was to end in disaster for our lion population.

The two Kuhuma males we see on a regular basis came down to the southern reaches of their territory to mate with two of the Styx pride females (which are in estrus at the moment). The fact that they are territorial also means that the Kuhuma Males are very vocal. A bout of territorial calling eventually brought about the inevitable.

We awoke one morning to an update that the Mapogo Males were in “full swing”. Upon reaching the sighting we found three of them all roaring and very mobile to the east. We followed the leading male - he led us straight to two more of the group moving around the female lion which had been mating with the Kuhuma boys the previous day.

A massive fight ensued between the Kahuma and the Mapogo male lions - and the Kuhumans came off second best. We followed four of the Mapogos as they pursued the Styx female. Late in the drive everything calmed down with all four males and the female lying down in the shade.

Upon our return to the sight in the afternoon, we found that the Mapogo males now had two females with them and that two of the males were mating with them, pausing occasionally only to keep the others at bay.

Later on in the drive, the bigger of the two Kuhuma brothers was located. He was in a badly injured state, unable to move. His enemies (the four Mapogo males) were no more than two hundred meters away. What followed was pure proof of “Survival of the Fittest”! Upon our return the next day we found the badly mauled remains of the once proud Kuhuma male.

Only time will tell what this means for our lion population. The Kuhuma pride and their cubs will from now on be under constant threat from other marauding males with only one brother left to protect the cubs. The Mapogos were last seen heading back from whence they came.

On a happier note….. A few days ago, while watching a feeding herd of wildebeest, one of the guests noticed something strange about one of the females in the herd. Upon closer inspection we found that she was in the final stages of labour, with one of the calf’s perfectly formed feet already visible. As we watched, the other front foot appeared. Mom had to lie down while straining and struggling to help her new baby into the world.
During all of this, the rest of the herd seemed to be blissfully unaware of what was happening in their midst. Exactly fifteen minutes later, however, we heard the first sounds of the baby. Suddenly the rest of the herd, as well as a nearby herd of zebra, started showing an interest – coming closer to have a look at the newborn. From birth to standing took precisely six minutes for the tiny calf. After about fifteen minutes it had its first suckle and after twenty minutes it was moving around on spindly but strong legs. This has been one of the most remarkable experiences to have shared with guests in a very long time, and one we will not easily forget.

We would like to wish you a wonderful close to 2007. It has been a remarkable year out here in Africa.

Until 2008,

Vriendelike Groete (Friendly Greetings)

All of us at Arathusa Safari Lodge

A collection of memorable images from 2007